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ABSTRACT

The evolution of cadre (political elite and bureaucratic functionaries) education in China from 1949 to the present was evaluated in terms of leadership development and the underlying interests of the Chinese Communist Party as it integrates more fully into the world economy. Historic achievements include: (1) increased knowledge about market economies; (2) increased use of management theory and practice; and (3) improved work performance efficiency. In 1998, to correct ongoing cadre problems (such as corruption, favoritism, and lack of civic responsibility) and to improve the governance capacity of cadres (to create greater social stability), the federal government initiated Three-Emphasis Education (emphasizing theory, study, political awareness, and work ethics improvement), an integral part of which was interviews with 1500 cadres. Findings included the following: (1) the hierarchical nature of the program prevented rapid improvements and public access to program evaluation; (2) poor systemization into cadre's daily work caused corruption to resurface once education was complete; and (3) the lack of an educational objective to change the Chinese bureaucracy (the current objective was to change individuals only). Inclusion of the public in the process of cadre political education is recommended in order to strengthen educational outcomes. (The bibliography lists seven references). (AJ)

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Education for Better Governance: A Look at the Ongoing Cadre Political Education in China

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Abstract: The cadre political education in China is essentially featured by the government's efforts in transforming cadres' ideology, morality, and work ethics in order to create a better social image of the Chinese cadres in the public, to improve the relationship between the cadres and the masses, and to accomplish better governance for the people.

Introduction

As a part of the comprehensive cadre development (called executive or leadership development in the West) program within the bureaucracy of the Chinese Communist Party, cadre political education has been emphasized and implemented at various hierarchical levels since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Particularly in the Chinese Communist Party's efforts in approaching better governance, cadre political education is playing an important role in building up a good public image, maintaining and improving the relations between the government and citizens, and promoting holistic social and economic development (Zeng, 2001).

Initiated at the end of 1998, a nationwide cadre political education movement, titled as the "Three-Emphasis" Education, has touched nearly every aspect of the Chinese people's social life. This movement is considered a major solution adopted by the Jiang Zemin's Administration, the Third Generation of Leadership in China, to prepare the Chinese bureaucracy for a new century, to accomplish better governance, and to promote the reform, the opening-up process, and the development of a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. This paper attempts to examine the functions of cadre political education in the Chinese social and economic context and is built on the basis of the interviews conducted in Shandong Province from March to June 2000 after the "Three-Emphasis" Education had been implemented for two years.

This paper consists of four parts. The first part is a brief introduction of the general situation of cadre education in China from 1949 up to now. The second part describes the "Three-Emphasis" Education, the ongoing cadre political education movement. In the third section, the core of this paper, interviews are analyzed, conclusions are drawn from the primary data, and cadre political education in China is critiqued.

General Situation of Cadre Education in China

Since its founding 80 years ago, the Chinese Communist Party, now the largest party in the world in terms of the number of party members (over 64 million) (Jiang, 2001), has constantly attached great significance to cadre education and development.

Before the liberation in 1949, the term "cadre" referred to revolutionary leaders who assumed responsibility for specific tasks, as opposed to the masses who were followers. After the Chinese Communist Party seized power, the term "cadre" was applied administratively to all those who were state employees but not engaged in productive manual labor (Lee, 1990). However, in common usage, the meaning of "cadre" is limited and it normally refers to trained

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staff members of the party or state institutions holding administrative positions. In other words, cadres are political elite and bureaucratic functionaries (Jiang, 1993).

In the early 1980s, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, under the pressure both from the external global environment and the interior demands from the people, promulgated a piece of Basic State Policy, which sought to "revitalize the nation through education". This occurred after the inception of Chinese reform and an opening-up of the society in 1978, which is widely viewed as a milestone in the Chinese educational history.

Cadre education is one important part of global educational strategy. In the past two decades governments at each level have heavily invested in various kinds of cadre education projects in educational infrastructure construction, program design, and international cadre education cooperation. One outstanding achievement of nearly 20-year educational efforts by the Chinese Communist Party is that cadres in the public sector became more knowledgeable in market economy and management theory and practices, and demonstrated more efficiency in their work performance. Despite the obvious positive results, however, serious problems have gradually emerged because of many cases of corruption among cadres (Deng, 1994). While becoming more "economically civilized", many governmental officials were discovered seriously corrupt including such practices as cheating at work, embezzling, graft, bribery, smuggling, prostituting, lowered work ethics through favoritism, and lack of sense of responsibility. More and more complaints from the masses focused on the request that the cadres' political qualities (loyalty to the Party and the people), morality, and career ethics be enhanced (Zeng, 2001). Formerly described as a fish-water relationship, the relation between governmental officials and the public deteriorated, and the credibility as role models of the Chinese Communist Party cadres was gradually damaged. "To serve the people wholeheartedly" is the fundamental objective of the Chinese Communist Party, which is clearly stated in the Party Constitution. The purpose of cadre political education is to further improve working style and ethics, and transform the values, worldviews and ideology of the leaders at various hierarchical levels through educational approaches so that the Chinese Communist Party can represent the fundamental interests of the people in China (Jiang, 2000).

Ongoing Cadre Political Education in China

Cadre political education determines the fate of the Chinese Communist Party and the direction of national development. The result of cadre political education directly determines whether the Chinese Communist Party can maintain its leading role and stability of governance (Deng, 1994). To tackle the existing problems among the party cadres, especially those problems regarding cadre corruption and malpractices in governance, the Jiang's Administration initiated the "Three-Emphasis" Education (emphasis on theory study, political awareness enhancement, and work ethics improvement) at the end of 1998.

In general, the contents of the ongoing "Three-Emphasis" Education in China, include three parts. First, cadres are required to study Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, and Deng Xiaoping's theories in constructing socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. The second is political awareness education, whose aims is to raise the cadres' sensitivity to social issues in order to develop a sense of responsibility and accountability for the people and for the whole nation. The third part of the education is centered on the cadres' morality and working ethics with the objective of educating cadres to be righteous, honest and loyal in their work. The three parts of the contents are integrated as a whole.

Educational Participation and Implementation

In the highly centralized bureaucracy of the Chinese Communist Party, there are fundamentally 5 hierarchical levels: premier level, province/ministry level, municipal/prefecture/department level, county/division level, and township/section level. As required by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, all the cadres on and above the county /division level in the hierarchy of the Chinese bureaucracy should participate in the education.

At the end of 1998, the "Three-Emphasis" Education commenced as a national project. It took place at different hierarchical levels in a top-down sequence. The members of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party initiated the education and then with the model built up by the top level in the Chinese bureaucracy, cadres at various levels including provincial level, municipal level and county level started. During the process of the educational implementation at the local levels, the Central Committee designated investigation teams to supervise the educational activities in order to guarantee the quality of education. In addition, after the educational implementation was completed at each level, auditing teams were set up by the cadres at the next supervisory level to evaluate the education including implementation of individual transformational action plans, social implications, and possible areas for further improvement in educational activities.

There are basically four steps in carrying out the educational activities at each level. First, the participants study relevant works. Then the participants complete a report combining self-analyses upon their behaviors and attitudes at work in the past few years and the critiques and suggestions collected from peers and subordinates. Third, the participants have panel discussions to engage in self-criticism and to exchange ideas with the objective of finalizing individual transformational action plans. In the fourth step, the participants implement their individual action plans and show the results to their supervisors, peers and subordinates.

Data Collection and Findings

Interviews

In February 2000 the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party designated more than thirty five-person Auditing Teams to each province, ministry, and autonomous region to evaluate the cadre political education after the cadres at the provincial and municipal levels had completed the educational procedure. As a civil servant working for the Central Government, I was designated Shandong Province to do the auditing work from March to June. I talked to the more than 50 officials at different levels with the purpose of acquiring a holistic picture of the "Three-Emphasis" Education. The interviewees included the senior cadres at the provincial level, and officials at the municipal level and county level from three municipalities (Binzhou Municipality, Heze Municipality, and Linyi Municipality). In addition, I visited some retired senior officials, cadres in county and township governments (Wudi County, Zhanhua County) and some farmers in villages. The interviews including individual interview and group interview mainly focused on the individual transformation and social implications after educational activities were carried out.

Findings

All the interviewees regarded the education as necessary. In their individual reports I found the alleged commonalities concerning the participants' educational activities, such as strictly following the guidelines and requirements from the Central Government, seriously doing

self-analysis and self-criticism, increasing sense of responsibility and consciousness to serve the people, setting up higher standards for self-discipline to become more ethical and honest in work, and formulating specific individual transformational action plans.

On the provincial level the most obvious achievements are manifested in the following aspects. First, the solidarity of cadres in leadership groups has been rebuilt during the process of political education, especially the process of self-criticism and reflection. Second, some issues about which the public complained most have been solved. For example, in Shandong Province, the public complained that some senior officials kept several public apartments for their family. After the education, more than 8,000 apartments were returned to the public from senior officials and many officials did this voluntarily. On the municipal level, according to the data collected in two municipalities, the cadres became more committed to helping the public solve practical problems. In Wudi and Zhanhua counties in Binzhou Municipality, for many years people suffered from the lack of freshwater because of the saline-alkali soil in those areas. The cadres on the municipal and county level determined to solve the problems and bring benefits to the local people. After nearly 2 years' efforts, they realized the dream that the local people never expected to become true: every household in every village of Wudi and Zhanhua counties was piped with freshwater.

Analysis of the "Three-Emphasis" Education

The "Three-Emphasis" Education is a cadre political education movement implemented within the bureaucracy of the Chinese Communist Party. It helped the cadres in the bureaucratic system to reflect and re-examine their work through an educational approach in order to enhance their awareness and initiatives in serving the people. It functions as a tool to improve the political quality of the Chinese bureaucracy and the relationship between cadres and the masses.

The "Three-Emphasis" Education was proposed in a very critical situation and at a historically important time. There is a popular saying to describe the change of cadres from Mao's time to Deng's time. "In Mao's time, cadres go to villages to be with farmers; In Deng's time, cadres go to market to be with money." After the Tian'anmen Square events in 1989, the Party realized that the cadre corruption endangered the Party's development and shook the pedestal of its power. The masses began losing confidence in the Party and the distance between the cadres and the masses became more pronounced. The Jiang's Administration faced the serious question of how to rebuild cadres with a good social image in the public for the new century so as to improve the relation with the masses and maintain the Party's position in power?

Critiques of Cadre Political Education

Despite the significant achievements resulted from the "Three-Emphasis" Education, some problems did exist in the design and implementation of the educational movement. First of all the "Three-Emphasis" Education is a top-down process initiated by the highest level of the Chinese bureaucracy – the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The targets are the cadres on and above the county/division level. This indicates that the party is trying to cure its symptom by itself. It may be irrational to assert that patients cannot cure themselves with their own efforts, but it is safe and wise to say that if with some assistance from the outside, the symptom could be removed more quickly. In the case of the "Three-Emphasis" Education, the potential assistance is in the public. However, as a matter of fact, the public has few accesses to the educational activities. For example, the participants' individual reflection reports have been submitted only to the next higher level of bureaucracy, but are seldom open to the public.

Second, the "Three-Emphasis" Education was designed to function as a medicine, not as a tonic. As some interviewees mentioned, it was possible that some cadres would slip back to what they were like before the education upon its completion. Failing to systemize the education in the cadre's daily work may cause loss of sustainability and eventually lead to unpleasant consequences. Third, in the whole process of education, the educational focus was on people instead of existing structures or systems in the Chinese bureaucracy. In other words, the educational objective is to change individuals in the system and not to examine the system in which the individual live. Self-discipline and self-criticism are extremely important for cadres to keep honest in governmental work, but the system itself can shape people in accordance with the nature of the system. The phenomenon of cadre corruption cannot be solely traced back to the people factor. Rather, the structure in which the cadres are operating is bound to have some responsibility for it. As Box (1988) said, any massive change in individuals will eventually require new structures to house it even though structure alone does not determine political outcomes.

It is clear that the cadre political education aims at transforming cadres to be more responsible and accountable for serving the people so as to create better governance. Through the efforts of transforming the individual cadres, the Party expects to formulate a stable social status and a more sound national leadership group. The education itself shows the determination of the Party to push itself closer to the public by improving its own image and quality. In the Chinese Communist Party Constitution, the Party stated that it came from the masses and should go back to the masses, and since its founding 80 years ago, the Party set up its fundamental aim as wholeheartedly serving the people. As a tool, cadre political education was applied for guaranteeing the continuity and coherence of this goal among a large number of cadres. No party in a country can survive without the support from the masses. The masses are like water and the party is like a boat. The water can both support the boat and submerge the boat. To keep alive, the party needs to approach and solicit support from the people by fully involving the people in cadre educational activities. Without participation of the people, the Party missed the chance to tap the huge potential of assistance from the people.

The auditing process designed by the Central Committee also was not participative for the public because only a small number of interviewees came from the outside of the government. To transform the individual cadres, so as to transform the Party and the society, the cadre political education should not have alienated the Party from the public. Moreover, there exists a traditional technical question in the evaluation process, i.e., sometimes it is hard to prove that some results are originated by cadre education. Once again, the existence of a weak link between results and education can probably affect the public's trust and support in cadre education movement.

Conclusion

As China is marching to the goal of a more democratic and modern country, cadre education is playing an important role in building up a strong and reliable leadership group and creating better governance. Among various cadre education programs, political education is emphasized for cadres in the Chinese bureaucracy to transform ideology, morality and working ethics and to better serve the people.

Cadre political education is a unique form of adult education in the Chinese bureaucracy. On one hand, it helps the Chinese Communist Party to build a better social image in the public, to strengthen the relations between the cadres and the masses, to fight against cadres' corruption

and malpractices in governance, and to maintain and solidify the power of the Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese political arena. It paves an even path for the future development of the Chinese Communist Party in the new era through preparing its cadres in terms of ideology, morality and work ethics. On the other hand, the cadre political education demonstrates the party's intention to solve its problems within the highly centralized structure of bureaucracy by its own efforts without involving the masses on a large scale. In addition, the question of to what extent the cadres can deal with their own real problems remains unanswered. The better inclusion of the masses in the process of the cadre political education is likely to strengthen the overall effects of the cadre political education in China.

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